Podcast 2: Increasing Student Self-Regulation and Self-Monitoring Skills

Andrew: Welcome to Y4Y's Podcast series, "Structuring Successful Homework Help and Tutoring Sessions!" I'm Andrew, and I'm a member of the You for Youth (Y4Y) Technical Assistance Team. In this series, we will interview out-of-school time professionals about their experience in helping youth get the most out of their homework help and tutoring sessions. Joining us today for our second podcast is Joelle, a Site Coordinator, and her Program Director, Janice, here to discuss changes in student expectations from the school-day. We wanted to get their feedback on ways to support students in developing strong self-regulation and self-monitoring skills.

Andrew: Joelle and Janice, thank you so much for joining us today!

Janice and Joelle: It's good to be here, thanks./It's good to be here.

Andrew: So, Joelle, Janice shared with Y4Y that you had begun to notice students coming to your homework help or tutoring session with assignments that required them to think more abstractly or with real-world problems to solve—problems that can have more than one possible solution.

Joelle: Starting before the pandemic, I definitely started seeing students tackling many more research projects and other long-term assignments. It seemed like gone were the days of the drill and skill worksheets or workbook practice assignments.

Andrew: Janice, what inside information did you have about this trend?

Janice: You know, it's funny, I had just wrapped my kick-off meeting with the principals for the year when Joelle brought this up. During the meeting the principal had informed me of new curricula purchased for their core classes – so ELA, Math, Science and Social Studies. The curricula was entirely comprised of project-based learning and the school had made the switch so they could better connect school-day learning to skills essential for success in life. This did mean, though, a switch was happening around expectations for student thinking and the type of work they were producing. Students were now being asked to think critically, problem solve, collaborate with peers, mentors or experts and instead of practice worksheets for homework, students were being asked to conduct research and work on projects.

Andrew: So, Joelle, as a site coordinator, did you feel equipped for this change?

Joelle: It definitely left me wondering if we would need to adjust our homework and tutoring sessions.

Janice: As the principals were describing the shift and the new curricula and the new strategies. I just asked a lot of questions, one of which was "How can we help?" So, they did ask for our support with two specific skills, self-regulation and self-monitoring. A lot of the teachers were new to project-based learning, and they hadn't really realized that doing so makes a lot of assumptions about students' abilities to self-regulate, self-monitor, do that well and then apply those skills to the learning process. So, the teachers hadn't prepped the students or prepared any activities or lessons that would help students who weren't maybe as strong with those skills develop them.

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Podcast 2: Increasing Student Self-Regulation and Self-Monitoring Skills

This really left several or many of the students struggling and those happened to be a lot of the same students that were also in our 21st Century program.

Andrew: Janice, can you share with our listeners exactly what is meant by "self-regulation" and "self-monitoring?" And what did you suggest to Joelle would be the best way to support students in developing these skills?

Janice: Yes, of course! So, put simply, self-regulation means our ability to think through a situation, consider actions and consequences that may result from a behavior and make a conscious choice about how we behave. Self-monitoring is a strategy that builds a person's ability to self-regulate. When a person is self-monitoring, they're keeping a record and using that record to adjust their behavior. So, if I made this choice, what was the end result and should I make that choice again. When we're thinking about project-based learning these are really key skills to managing workflow, handling frustration and navigating collaboration.

Joelle: I like to compare it to riding a bike. You switch gears in response to how fast you want to peddle over a certain area. The students have been building bikes in their STEAM club, so they're learning the mechanics of how gears help a bicyclist use their machine most effectively. Students with an ability to self-regulate can easily or almost automatically shift into a different gear. But as we know from riding a bike, it takes practice and attention to a lot of subtle factors, some that we can control and some that we can't, to really master those smooth transitions.

Andrew: That's very well put!

Janice: It absolutely is! I urged Joelle to share that analogy with the students. Once she did, we saw right away that it helped make an abstract concept concrete. It really supported students in understand what we meant when we were talking about self-regulation and self-monitoring.

Andrew: What sort of support did you get from your school-day partners? Did the principals share any activities or ideas to help students develop these skills in self-regulating and self-monitoring?

Janice: Well, they really stressed the need for time and opportunity. Helping students self-regulate is not about "filling" their minds with a set of skills like you would a bucket; it's really the opposite of that. It's about building relationships and creating an environment where students are comfortable trying, practicing, engaging and then creating space and opportunity for students to think critically and be curious. As Joelle and I were talking, we realized the best approach would be to create a series of games and fun activities that can be woven throughout homework and tutoring time. For example, Joelle asked students to draw a picture of the ideal homework setting and label each section. She then had them co-create the space, use it for a bit, self-monitor their feelings and productivity and then make revisions. This provided students with a low stakes way to practice thinking about options, making a conscious choice and then assessing the result of that choice.

Joelle: We also developed a simple activity where students could try out different methods and strategies for setting goals, mapping out progress, developing and sticking to a timeline and

Podcast 2: Increasing Student Self-Regulation and Self-Monitoring Skills

reflecting on their experience. At Janice's suggestion, we based this new exercise on the topics and activities students were most interested in. I will say, though, at first, I was concerned that students wouldn't really fully listen or pay attention while I was giving directions, modeling, or trying to assist them when they got stuck or frustrated on an assignment, even if it seemed easy enough, in principle, to incorporate these new self-regulation strategies.

Andrew: So how did you address that concern?

Janice: What Joelle just described is really that process of identifying a skill or sub-skill, then deciding how you can explicitly teach the skill, then creating activities where students practice that. So, to engage students in self-regulation and self-monitoring, they really need to listen, understand directions and then practice. So, Joelle identified the need for students to have a sub-skill, or strong active listening skills. So, Joelle and few other staff did some research and learned that moving through guided visualization was a great activity for developing active listening skills. In visualization you have students close their eyes and picture a story that you're telling so they really have to listen to your words and create something that matches.

Joelle: We also had students practice having conversations with each other. They would take notes and discuss what details they noticed throughout these conversations. This was a really impactful activity that took very little prompting, like, "share some details about your family tree," because it built those listening and focusing skills necessary for self-regulation AND it strengthened connections between our students. I noticed how helpful it was to have my students "think-aloud" or verbalize what they were thinking and hearing. It absolutely helped them to focus.

Andrew: So, does that sum up how your program sought to develop self-regulation and self-monitoring skills in out-of-school time?

Janice: Almost! We continued to create our list of additional skills or strategies that students would need to self-regulate and self-monitor. We tackled understanding and naming the two skills, active listening, but we also realized we needed a physical strategy. So, something that kids can do when they realized their bodies were energized or anxious. So, I asked Joelle to include "brain-breaks" or exercise breaks throughout homework help or tutoring sessions. Any physical activity such as deep breathing, stretching, or jumping can be an outlet for students. So, as they are self-monitoring their physical and emotional status, they can call upon these strategies for making course corrections. If you are a person or a student that you have a lot of energy or you have trouble focusing, you can request a "brain-break". If you are feeling stressed or frustrated students can draw upon sentence starters to express themselves. Joelle similarly used learning games and activities that required students to make choices, encouraged collaborations, and promote communication, and all of these really get back to the idea of creating a fun safe space where students can name a skill, learn a skill, and then practice using the skill in a way that gets them better at that skill.

Joelle: Yeah, now that the students are getting the hang of this kind of framework, we have started to receive positive feedback from school-day teachers. We're actually meeting next week to talk

Podcast 2: Increasing Student Self-Regulation and Self-Monitoring Skills

more formally about the improvements they've seen in student self-regulation and self-monitoring.

Janice: Right, and I'll continue to follow-up with the principals to see how our activities are impacting and affecting the student's ability to engage in the new curriculum.

Andrew: So, our key takeaways here are that underdevelopment in self-regulation makes participation and completing any assignment difficult. The good news is that out-of-school time professionals like you two can help students build self-regulation during their homework time and tutoring sessions. In fact, I think our listeners can see that by providing opportunities for students to practice and master these skills within your program, you are not only supporting students' school-day work, but also setting the students up for long-term success.

Janice and Joelle: Oh, definitely!/ I like to think so.

Andrew: Thank you both again for joining us, and thank you, listeners, for making Y4Y your partner in professional development.